



**VOTERS FOR  
ANIMAL RIGHTS**

786 Jefferson Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11221  
[vfar.org](http://vfar.org)

## **2020 New York State Senate & Assembly Election Questionnaire**

### **About Us**

Launched in 2017, Voters For Animal Rights (VFAR) is a New York based 501c(4) grassroots multi-issue animal advocacy organization that is building political power for animals. In 2019, VFAR led the successful campaign to ban foie gras in NYC, and to stop wild bird poaching. We also led the campaign to ban the use of wild animals in circuses in NYC. We look forward to working with you to win more victories for animals and make the state of New York a leader in compassionate public policy.

Our mission is to elect candidates who support animal protection, lobby for stronger laws to stop animal cruelty, and hold elected officials accountable to humane voters. VFAR mobilizes public concern for animals through the political process. We know that animal protection is not only a moral issue but a bi-partisan political issue as well. Over 90% of Americans believe that animals need protection from abuse and exploitation. To that end, we organize humane voters to support candidates that care about animals. If you support animals, then we want to support you! There are over 60,000 humane voters throughout New York state, hundreds of which are volunteers for VFAR who are ready to knock on doors, make phone calls and get out the vote to elect people who will stand up for animals. We deliver the vote – for the animals and for you.

As an example, here is our [animal-friendly voter guide](#) from the 2019 NYC Special Election for Public Advocate.

### **Endorsement Process**

Candidates seeking our endorsement for the New York State Assembly and Senate are **required** to fill out this questionnaire and submit to [woof@vfar.org](mailto:woof@vfar.org) by **June 1, 2020**. *Please let us know if you need more time.*

### **Questions**

If you have any questions about the topics in our questionnaire, please don't hesitate to reach out to [allie@vfar.org](mailto:allie@vfar.org) and [david@vfar.org](mailto:david@vfar.org). We are happy to help you better understand animal protection policy, and we're happy to advise your campaign.

*Allie Feldman Taylor, David Karopkin, Esq., Julie Cappiello, Joyce Friedman, Heather Greenhouse, Kathy Nizzari, Michelle Aptman, Stewart Mitchell*

**Board of Directors, Voters For Animal Rights**



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## Candidate Contact Information & Campaign Information

Sarita Bhandarkar	She/Her/Hers	[REDACTED]	<a href="mailto:connect@saritaforny.com">connect@saritaforny.com</a>
Candidate Name	Pronouns	Cell Phone	Email

Virginia Scott	She/Her/Hers	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Campaign Manager	Pronouns	Cell Phone	Email

District: 99 AD

Party: DEM, WFP

Office Sought: NYS 99 AD

Name of Campaign Committee: Sarita for Assembly

Campaign Field Office Address: P.O. Box 973, Goshen, NY 10924

Campaign Website: [www.saritaforny.com](http://www.saritaforny.com)

## Personal Initiatives

1. Do you feel that promoting the humane treatment of animals should be a priority for the New York State Legislature?

*I think promoting humane treatment of animals is a way of life and should be, ideally, incorporated into all facets of society.*

2. Do you have any achievements to date on humane issues, e.g. supporting humane legislation, adopting a shelter pet, volunteering with an animal rescue organization, supporting any national or local animal protection orgs, living a plant-based (vegan or vegetarian) lifestyle, etc.? Did you grow up with or currently live with any companion animals?

*I have two shelter cats and one rescue dog at present. From childhood, our pets were usually strays/rescues. I have been a vegetarian since the age of twelve when I gave up eating meat for ethical reasons. Over the last few years, I have adhered to an increasingly vegan diet for both health reasons and ethical reasons.*

3. What animal issues will you prioritize and lead on as a member of the NYS legislature?

*Discouraging factory farming practices.*



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4. Will you commit to having a designated person in your office to handle animal issues?

*It would depend on budget, but most likely this responsibility would be one of several designated to the same staff person.*

5. How would you work to empower the animal advocacy community to reach new success and growth into the 2020-2022 term, and ensure that New York is on the forefront of animal protection?

*I am not sure yet, but I think the most effective approach is focusing on how these issues tie into the environment and personal health and well-being.*

## **Positions on Legislation and Policy**

### **1. Companion Animals: Pet Stores**

With thousands of homeless animals waiting for loving forever homes in shelters and rescues all over New York State, why should pet stores and breeders be allowed to profit off the backs of animals? The puppy and kitten mill/pet store connection create lives of misery from beginning to end. Breeding facilities and pet stores have repeatedly been found to have poor sanitation, infectious disease, animals overcrowded in cages with no exercise, lack of proper veterinary care, lack of protection from harsh weather conditions, and lack of adequate food and water. These conditions result in great suffering, and many sick animals are sold to unaware consumers. [More info here.](#)

***Would you cosponsor and vote for [S4234A/A6298A](#) (Gianaris / Rosenthal) which would ban the sale of dogs, cats and rabbits in pet stores unless they come from a shelter or rescue?***

**YES / **NO****

***Additional Comments: I would not. I am personally opposed to the use of mills, but if these animals are not sold in pet stores, they will be sold directly from breeders, either inside or outside of NYS. Education is my preferred approach for discouraging puppy mills.***

### **2. Animals Used for Fashion: Fur**

Fur farms breed and confine animals in tiny, filthy cages where they suffer intense stress and unimaginable cruelty. They are beaten, bludgeoned, electrocuted, and skinned alive. Trapping animals in the wild is no better — animals are trapped in cruel leg hold traps where they can suffer for days in excruciating pain — starving, until a trapper returns to shoot or bludgeon them to death. Coyotes are known to attempt to chew off their own



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legs trying to break free. Many other animals are unintentionally caught and killed in these traps, including household pets. California has enacted a ban on the sale of fur. Several countries such as Norway, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Japan, and the U.K. have taken steps to close fur farms. With public awareness and innovative alternatives on the rise, many popular designers have stopped using all animal fur. There are ethical alternatives to fur which are not only stylish and warm but environmentally friendly. More info [here](#).

**Would you cosponsor and vote for [A5040A](#) (Rosenthal), that would ban the sale of new apparel products using real animal fur?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:** *I am honestly not sure. I am opposed to the production and sale of fur and have been since I was a child. However, banning sales in New York will not eliminate the fur industry. I think existing practices can be more closely regulated, but I do not think banning through legislation will be effective. I think, as with puppy/kitten mills, the goal is to decrease demand through consumer education.*

### **3. Animals Used in Entertainment**

#### **A. Rodeo Cruelty**

While New York State has limited the use of animals in circuses and other entertainment, rodeos have been left unregulated despite the display of similar, and in many cases more egregious, acts of cruelty. Rodeos typically include an event called "calf roping" where [baby calves are shocked with electric prods](#), forcing them to run as soon as the holding chute opens, only to be "clotheslined" with a rope and tied at the legs. Panicked calves are routinely injured or killed during these performances. Rodeos also continue to use flank straps or bucking straps, which are tightly fastened around the animal's abdomen and may be used with sharp-ened spurs to cause pain to the animal, encouraging them to buck more violently. Rodeos are responsible for causing death or serious injury to countless animals, all for the sole purpose of entertainment and showmanship.

**Would you cosponsor and vote for [A8554/S7971](#) (Rosenthal/Addabbo) which would prohibit these practices at rodeos?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:** *There is no reason/justification for these practices.*

#### **B. Animal Circuses**

Circuses that use animals have been cited as a source of cruelty and exploitation for animals. Even if the basic levels of care and protection that the federal Animal Welfare Act demands are met, circuses force wild animals to languish in cages while travelling from performance to performance, without ever having the opportunity to exercise natural behaviors. Worse, time after time we see reports of [circus animals being beaten and whipped](#),



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having their limbs tied together to facilitate training, being shocked to ensure compliance, not being provided with adequate food, water and shelter, and other instances of cruelty.

**Would you cosponsor and vote for [A3673/S5408](#) (Englebright/Martinez) which would prohibit the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation from issuing permits or licenses that would authorize wild animals to appear in circuses?**

**YES / NO** There is no reason for this practice to still be going on. There are alternate forms of entertainment.

### **C. Carriage Horses**

Advocates have long called out the poor working and living conditions for horses used for NYC carriage rides. As recently as March 2020, a 12-year-old horse was euthanized after [collapsing in Central Park](#), a tragic incident that was captured on video camera by a horrified pedestrian. Despite improvements implemented over the years, these horses are still forced to travel through NYC traffic to get to and from Central Park, they work long days sometimes in extreme weather conditions, with no opportunity for daily turnout. Over the course of the past three decades, there have been countless incidents and accidents involving New York City carriage horses and many have died on the streets of NYC or been sent to slaughter once they are unable to continue working.

**Would you cosponsor and vote for legislation to ban horse carriages in New York City?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:** Yes, I think these carriages are cruel; but how this is done would need to be thought through as it would be putting individuals, many of whom are immigrants, out of business.

### **4. Animals Used for Experimentation: School Hatching Projects**

Principals and school teachers should end the use of bird-hatching projects and replace them with learning activities that teach life processes without the use of live animals. School classroom incubation and hatching projects of baby chicks and ducks is cruel and leads to the abandonment and death of countless young birds each year. Once the eggs develop and the cute baby birds grow up, schools realize that they have no plan for the adult birds. These hatching-project birds are deprived of a mother hen. The birds are often abandoned in city parks where they cannot survive on their own or dumped at local animal shelters and rescues who are already overburdened with unwanted animals. Hatching projects encourage the view that animals are disposable objects instead of living creatures requiring a lifetime of care and commitment. Humane alternatives have been developed by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), HEART, and humane educators. More info can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

**For Assembly candidates: Would you cosponsor and vote [A00058](#) (Rosenthal) that would prohibit schools from using eggs, live baby chickens and ducks for classroom projects?**



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**For Senate candidates: Would you introduce or cosponsor legislation a senate version of A0058 that would prohibit schools from using eggs, live baby chickens and ducks for classroom projects?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:**

### **5. Factory Farms, Live Animal Slaughter Markets and Transportation**

There are more than [600 factory farms](#) in New York State, confining animals and engaging in heinously cruel practices such as castration of pigs, cows, and other mammals without painkillers, “debeaking” or “beak cutting” of chickens and turkeys without painkillers, confinement of egg-laying hens in battery cages, confinement of baby cows in veal crates, and confinement of pigs in gestation crates. These factory farms are degrading the environment and poisoning our communities.

There are also [80+ slaughterhouses and live animal markets in NYC](#), in all five boroughs – more than any other U.S. city. These facilities in New York are no different than the live animal markets abroad where coronavirus started. In addition to brutally cruel treatment of the animals (tiny cages, no vet care, severely limited food and water), these storefront facilities pose a significant health and safety hazard to the community affecting the quality of life for neighborhood residents. Blood, feces, urine, dismembered body parts, and feathers are routinely found on our public sidewalks and streets due to the unsanitary conditions associated with storefront slaughterhouses. They are also a breeding ground for infectious diseases — avian flu has been found in many NYC live animal markets. Many of these slaughterhouses are located close to schools and playgrounds. Additionally, when large animals such as cows, bulls, and goats escape (as routinely happens), including during transport, it puts us all in danger, even causing a [multi-hour traffic jam on the Verrazano Bridge](#). Sometimes these animals are allowed to be rescued by a farm animal sanctuary but most often they are killed.

***Especially in light of pandemics that originate from crowded, unsanitary live animal markets, would you support a permanent ban on the operation of all factory farms? Would you support legislation [A10399/S8291](#) (Rosenthal/Sepulveda) that would ban the operation of live animal markets in New York City?***

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments: *I would support banning live markets. While I am personally opposed to factory farms, I do not think these farms can be banned overnight. I think we need to use the tax code, farmer subsidies, and education of consumers in order to encourage consumers to buy only from free range and family farms if they are going to consume animal products.***

***Would you cosponsor and vote for legislation to ban confining animals and other cruel practices such as (a) castration of pigs, cows, and other mammals without painkillers, (b) “debeaking” or “beak***



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**cutting” of chickens and turkeys without painkillers, (c) confinement of egg-laying hens in battery cages, confinement of baby cows in veal crates, and (d) confinement of pigs in gestation crates?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:**

**[S6252/A8009](#) (Gianaris/Weprin) is legislation that would renew the state moratorium prohibiting new licenses for slaughter facilities in NYC. It has passed both houses. Will you reach out to Governor Cuomo and ask him to sign the bill?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments: *Yes, provided that there are adequate facilities already in place where sufficiently humane practices are in place for the animals and safety measures are in place for the workers.***

**Would you cosponsor, support and vote for legislation to require that any animal who escapes a slaughterhouse or transport vehicle be released to an animal sanctuary or other rescue?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments: *I think this legislation could lead to individuals “aiding and abetting” the escapes which could cause chaotic results for farmers.***

## **6. Food and Health**

### **A. Dairy Subsidies and transition to plant-based suppliers in New York State**

Milk and other dairy products are top agricultural products in New York State, but demand for and sales of dairy products in the U.S. have dropped precipitously in recent years, while sales of non-dairy milks have grown substantially. This change comes as more research and information illuminate the harmful effects of dairy on adult and children’s health, the environment and animal welfare. Regardless, the quality of individual animal care offered by a given farm, dairy production necessarily involves farmers taking newborn calves from their mothers, who bellow and chase after them. Instead of a mother’s milk going to her babies, her calves are taken to veal farms where they are kept isolated in small plastic huts in rows upon rows. Perhaps worst is that forcibly impregnating, tail docking, and beating downed cows are standard practices on NY dairy farms. Former dairy companies like long-time New York producers like Elmhurst Dairy are making the switch to non-dairy products. New York based companies offering healthy food, yet every year taxpayers subsidize New York’s dairies with as much as \$60 million in credits.

**Would you support ending or reducing the immense subsidies that New York provides dairy farmers, and reallocating them to plant-based initiatives?**



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**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:** *I would support reducing dairy subsidies over time as I would not want to destroy the livelihood of dairy farmers, and I would support encouraging education and providing subsidies for plant-based products.*

## **B. Food Labeling**

***Would you support legislation to require that any food products sold in New York must be labeled with information detailing the sourcing of the animals and the conditions the animals were raised in and requiring restaurants provide such signage?***

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:**

## **7. Protecting New York's Wildlife**

### **A. Wildlife Killing Contests**

Animal killing competitions are publicly held contests where the person or team who has killed the most animals, or the heaviest or largest animals is crowned the winner. In animal killing competitions, individuals compete to kill the most animals, the heaviest animal, or the largest animal. [Competitions such as these are inhumane and provide incentive to killing animals for glory, prizes or titles.](#) In many cases, these competitions are conducted in a party-like atmosphere and are more like slaughters or massacres and are unsportsmanlike. These competitions are considered cruel by many hunters.

***Would you cosponsor and vote for [A9775/S4253B](#) (Glick/Martinez) and [A722B/S7542/A722B](#) (Martinez/Serrano) to ban killing contests in New York State?***

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:**

### **B. Wildlife Management**

New York is home to an immense diversity of wildlife, whether in urban, suburban or rural areas. Even New York City's five boroughs are home to hundreds of species, including geese, deer, squirrels, ducks, raccoons, opossum, coyotes, hawks, eagles, whales, dolphins, seals, turkeys, beavers, bats, pigeons, rats, migratory birds, and so many more species. While many animals inhabit New York year-round, other species pass through on their annual migrations. USDA Wildlife Services is a federal agency notorious for exterminating





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millions of wild animals across the country in cruel manners, while ignoring and undermining humane approaches to coexisting with wildlife in New York. Examples of humane wildlife management practices include: Instead of killing Canada geese to reduce the threat of "bird strikes", nests are now being treated as a birth control method. In Staten Island, a deer vasectomy program was instituted as a more humane and effective approach to stabilizing the population, and turkeys were relocated to a sanctuary in upstate New York to avoid being slaughtered.

**Do you support New York City's [WildlifeNYC program](#), aimed to promote awareness, tolerance, coexistence, and understanding of urban wildlife? If you don't represent NYC, would you support a similar program for your district? How do you view our relationship to wildlife in New York State?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:** I live in the Hudson Valley, and I think our relationship to wildlife in NY is positive overall.

*In 2014, the New York State Department of Environmental Protection (DEC) declared, with no public input in support, and no clear scientific basis, that mute swans are an invasive species in New York, and soon thereafter proposed eliminating all mute swans in New York.*

**Would you support legislation reversing the New York State DEC's determination that mute swans are an invasive and prohibited species in New York, and allow mute swans to continue to exist?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:** My inclination is to say "yes" but I want more information for the DEC's reasoning.

**Do you oppose lethal management initiatives for "nuisance" wildlife such as Canada geese, deer and turkey populations that result in the cruel and needless killing of these animals in New York's parks by government contractors particularly where there are demonstrated non-lethal and humane alternatives that can be applied?**

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:** Yes, provided that there are non-lethal alternatives available. Where I live the geese and deer are fairly prolific and, honestly, a bit of a nuisance so if these populations can be humanely controlled, that would be good.

**Currently there are few brick and mortar wildlife rehabilitation centers in New York State, such as the Wild Bird Fund in Manhattan. Would you support funding initiatives to expand New York State's capacity for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation?**



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**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:** Yes, but this would not be an immediate priority given the current budget crisis. I would also want to know what NFPs are available to provide similar services.

### **8. Legal Rights for Animals**

In 2018, in a decision denying a habeas corpus claim brought on behalf of [two chimpanzees who had been kept for decades in small cages in a warehouse](#), Justice Eugene M. Fahey of the New York Court of Appeals issued a concurring opinion stating the following:

“To treat a chimpanzee as if he or she had no right to liberty protected by habeas corpus is to regard the chimpanzee as entirely lacking independent worth, as a mere resource for human use, a thing the value of which consists exclusively in its usefulness to others.... While it may be arguable that a chimpanzee is not a “person,” there is no doubt that it is not merely a thing.

***Do you believe that any animals should have an individual legal right to bodily liberty, and if so, would you support legislation that establishes such a right?***

**YES / NO**

**Additional Comments:** I think this would be difficult legislation to draft even though I personally believe that all creatures have innate values separate and apart from how they may be regarded as commodities by people.

Sarita Bhandarkar

August 2, 2020

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**CANDIDATE SIGNATURE**

**DATE**